

State of Alaska  
**Department of Health & Social Services**

**Frank H. Murkowski**  
Governor  
P.O. Box 110001  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001  
**NEWS RELEASE**



**Joel Gilbertson**  
Commissioner  
**907-465-3030**  
**FAX: 907-465-3068**  
[www.hss.state.ak.us](http://www.hss.state.ak.us)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: APRIL 7, 2003**  
Contact: Kerre Fisher, (907) 748-7398

## **SARS False Alarm Exercises Alaska's Plans**

**Anchorage, Alaska - -** Earlier today, a patient was admitted to Providence Hospital in Anchorage with symptoms consistent with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). After carefully reviewing the patient's symptoms and recent travel to Hong Kong, state health officials with the Alaska Division of Public Health's Section of Epidemiology initially determined that the case met the criteria of a suspected SARS case.

Laboratory samples revealed that the patient probably was infected with influenza and did not have SARS. As in most suspected cases around the country, testing for other viruses and causes eliminated SARS as the illness. No specific virus has been confirmed as the cause of SARS, however, scientists at CDC and other laboratories have detected a previously unrecognized coronavirus in patients with SARS. While the new coronavirus is still the leading hypothesis for the cause of SARS, other viruses are still under investigation as potential causes.

The patient arrived in Anchorage at Stevens International Airport where he was given an information card about SARS – cards are available to all passengers and flight crews of flights arriving from affected areas. Due to his symptoms and travel history, infection control officials at Providence placed the patient in a previously designated isolation room where he was evaluated as a possible SARS case. State Epidemiologists verified his symptoms, facilitated collection of laboratory specimens, and subsequently ruled him out as a suspected SARS case.

"We believe the system worked well and this false alarm helped us to exercise the plans we've put in place to respond to suspected SARS cases. Everyone communicated well and the plans were followed," said DPH Director Doug Bruce. "We're very pleased that the patient turned out not to have SARS, but now we'll be even more prepared for any future suspected cases," he added.

Information on symptoms of SARS and affected countries can be found on the following fact sheet and on these websites:

Alaska Division of Public Health, Section of Epidemiology  
[www.akepi.org](http://www.akepi.org)  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

###